

Articles and Interviews

From the Prelate

“The Mercy of God Gives Value to Human Freedom,” on the Occasion of the Feast of St. Josemaría, in *Acistampa*, Italy (June 26, 2016)

The mercy of God gives value to human freedom. God lets us act, and counts on our own contribution. He relies on each person’s professional skill: fishermen, professors, masons, craftsmen, government workers.... This is something that lies at the heart of St. Josemaría’s teaching. Commenting on our Lord’s invitation to Peter to put out into the deep, he said: “reject the pessimism that makes you a coward.”

It is in giving our own life to make Jesus known (which is what being a fisher of men means) that we find our true dignity. As the Second Vatican Council teaches in *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24, man “cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”

Our Lord led Peter to a higher

truth: from material success to a fruitful apostolate.

“Depart from me,” exclaimed Peter while still in the boat, “for I am a sinful man.” Like Peter, we too recognize that we are sinners. Moreover, like Jesus, we too find ourselves living alongside people who, inexplicably, are estranged, marginalized, rejected, or people who in their suffering enclose themselves in their own misery and loneliness.

St. Josemaría understood this reality right from his youth, and his pastoral heart spurred him to visit the sick and abandoned in hospitals or in their own homes, often in the poorest peripheries of Madrid.

In a letter written for the beatification of my predecessor, Pope Francis recalled that Blessed Alvaro had the same deep concern: “He went out into the poor districts to assist in the human and Christian formation of so many needy people.”

We, as Christ did with Peter, can awaken people’s amazement, by letting them experience our understanding and encouragement, or our spiritual and material help.

And just as Peter did, we can make use of our own work to show

others God's mercy: one who is a teacher, instructing the ignorant; a doctor, curing patients with human refinement; a judge, working with true professional dedication; a cook, preparing meals for the hungry....

And even in that very great "job" of being parents, you fathers and mothers are witnesses of mercy in every moment of the day, from morning till night, without rest, serving one another and raising your children in the joy of love. As Pope Francis says, "The works of mercy are infinite, each with its own seal, with the story of each face."

Finally, we can say with St. Josemaría that the life of a Christian should develop in "the atmosphere of God's mercy . . . That is where you strive to behave as a son or daughter of the Father."

Monthly Meditations on the Works of Mercy

January: Visiting and Caring for the Sick

The first corporal work of mercy the Church recommends to us is centered on visiting and caring for the sick: an effort we see Jesus carrying out frequently during his earthly journey. Among many such scenes from the Gospel, we see him curing Peter's mother-in-law (see *Mt* 8:14-15), raising the daughter of Jairus (see *Mk*

5:21-43), attending to the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda (see *Jn* 5:1-16) and pausing before the blind men waiting for him at the entrance to Jerusalem. The suffering of these people shows us how God goes out to encounter them, announcing to them the salvation he has come to bring all men and women.

In the sick, our Lord contemplates humanity in its clearest need of salvation. It often happens that, when we enjoy good health, the temptation to forget about God can arise; yet when sorrow or suffering come into our lives, perhaps then we recall the cry of the blind man Jesus met on leaving Jericho: "Son of David, have pity on me!" (*Mk* 10:47) In our weakness, we feel ourselves to be especially needy creatures.

Let us too pay attention to the hardships of others, as we see Christ doing. The Holy Spirit, infinite Love, will console other people through our company, our conversation, our respectful and constructive silence when a sick person needs it. We are all busy with many activities each day and our tasks multiply without ceasing, but we shouldn't let a demanding schedule cause us to forget about the sick.

There are many examples of saints who have imitated Jesus in this work of mercy. For example, Saint Josemaría used to say that Opus Dei was born—as a necessity—in the hospitals, and among